

I hesitate to write this particular column this week, because we have not completed the city's pandemic plan. But EMS Coordinator Mary Beaver and I have been working on the plan and procedures, department heads will have a chance to comment on it next Monday, and the plan is close to complete. And preparation for pandemic flu is a timely topic which really deserves the attention.

PANDEMIC FLU. The flu is a seasonal concern every year, but is typically not a major issue. However, the H1N1 or Swine Flu virus as a concern this year is a different situation all together because it has the potential to be pandemic.

A pandemic flu occurs when a new subtype of the influenza virus 1) develops and there is little or no immunity protection due to previous infection or vaccination in the human population, 2) is easily passed from human to human, 3) is found in many countries across the globe, and 4) causes severe illness in humans.

Flu-like symptoms include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, and stomach symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Healthy people may be at risk for more severe symptoms and serious medical complications. And with a full-blown pandemic it would be widespread: imagine 20 – 30 percent of the population home sick, either as individuals or as primary caregivers for ill family members. And the numbers could be higher.

THREE C'S. To prevent the spread of the flu (seasonal or pandemic), remember the Three C's: Clean, Cover, and Contain.

Clean. Wash your hands; wash them often. To kill an influenza virus, hands must be washed with soap and water (preferably warm) for 20 seconds. Sing "Happy Birthday" as a measure to make sure you wash your hands long enough. Better yet, sing it twice. Remind children to wash their hands. Sanitizers or wipes are also a hygiene option; use them for at least 10 seconds or until the sanitizer has dried. Alcohol-based sanitizers need to have an alcohol content of at least 60%.

On a daily basis, clean surfaces and commonly shared items like microwaves, refrigerator handles, phones, remote controls, doorknobs and handles, toilet seats and handles, faucets, light switches, and toys. Use a labeled household disinfectant or chlorine bleach mixture (9 parts water to 1 part bleach).

Cover. Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough. Use a tissue. If you don't have a tissue, use your shirt sleeve by coughing or sneezing into your elbow. Remind children to cover their noses and mouths when sneezing and coughing. And wash your hands when done coughing and sneezing.

Contain. Contain your germs. If you have flu-like symptoms, the Center for Disease Control recommends you stay at home until at least 24 hours after your fever has broke. Using fever-

reducing medicine does not count for breaking your fever. Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from spreading the sickness. If you think you need to visit your health provider, call first as an office visit may not be necessary and you don't want to expose other patients to the flu.

Of course, staying healthy by eating a balanced diet, exercising daily, getting enough sleep, and drinking plenty of fluids will help your body to resist and recover from infection.

Basic information about pandemic flu and family preparedness is available online at pandemic.wisconsin.gov and at www.co.rock.wi.us.

PANDEMIC PLAN. Aside from the immediate health concerns of individuals that contract the flu, there is also the impact on businesses when some 30% of employees can't show up at work. And the City of Evansville is a business. We have been developing a Pandemic Plan in preparation for widespread illness and extended employee absences. We're not quite done with the plan, still wanting a chance to learn from a webinar with state health officials on Wednesday and wanting final input from department heads next week.

The plan has several purposes: 1) to reduce the spread of pandemic flu among our employees and customers, 2) to minimize illness among employees and customers, 3) maintain critical city operations and services, and 4) to minimize social disruptions and economic impact of a pandemic.

HYGIENE. The emphasis of the plan is hygiene. Employees will be educated and reminded the importance of hand washing, covering a cough or sneeze, and workplace cleanliness. Wipes and other sanitizers have been made available for workplace cleanliness, especially at front counters or areas with frequent public contact.

SOCIAL DISTANCING. Employees are expected to use common sense and voluntarily stay home if they are ill. If employees exhibit flu-like symptoms and believed ill, they may be required to go home. They will be able to use sick leave during their absence. Alternatively, accrued compensatory time, vacation leave, or unpaid leave may be used if the employee has no sick leave. There may be some opportunity, but it will likely be very limited and considered on a case by case basis, that an ill employee may be able to work from home.

Similarly, customers, vendors, and the general public are expected to use common sense and voluntarily not enter public buildings if they are ill. Signs are being posted at the entrances of the Eager Free Public Library and City Hall as reminders. New and temporary commands or requirements, such as limiting access or prohibiting entry by persons exhibiting flu-like symptoms, may be appropriate to meet a particular set of circumstances. The Library does have a delivery option for people unable to come in person; please call 882-2260.

VACCINATION. Because of the essential nature of their positions and their inability to avoid contact with the public, Emergency Medical Service and Police employees are being given the option to be vaccinated for both the seasonal and H1N1 flu viruses at city expense.

PRIORITY SERVICES. The city provides a number of critical services such as water supply, wastewater treatment, electric supply, police, and ambulance. Other operations, such as payroll, cemetery, continuity of government, and snow plowing, also have high priorities. Some operations, such as leaf and brush collection, maintenance, library, parks, and general office may be important but could be suspended relatively easily in reaction to a pandemic.

In many cases, employees have specialized skills or licenses. If these employees are ill, we may need to rely on mutual aid agreements or an outside contract to fill an absence. But a pandemic would go beyond Evansville so relying on other agencies may be limited. In other cases, we may be able to re-assign employees from less critical operations to assist with more critical services.

This maintaining continuity of critical services is the main objective of the city's Pandemic Plan.